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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2885  
INFO RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 0880  
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 7454  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1288  
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 0875  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1753  
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 8361  
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY 0081  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 4080  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC PRIORITY

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG (HARRIS), INFO NEA/PPD  
STATE PASS USTR (BELL), USPTO (ADLIN AND ADAMS), USAID  
(MCCLOUD)  
USDOC FOR ITA/MAC/ONE (NATHAN MASON), ADVOCACY CTR (JAMES),  
AND CLDP (TEJTEL)  
CASABLANCA FOR FCS (ORTIZ)  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR NEA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [ETRD](#) [OEXC](#) [EAIR](#) [KPAO](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: FOR MINISTER OF TOURISM, TOURISM MORE THAN JUST  
MONEY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During Ambassador's March 16 courtesy call, Minister of Tourism Tijani Haddad expressed great enthusiasm for increasing American tourism to Tunisia and made an impassioned plea for increasing the level of cultural cooperation and exchanges between our two countries. Ambassador noted Northwest Airlines request for a codeshare flight and previewed possible USG and business delegation visits. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Sporting the traditional djebba in honor of Tunisia's March 16 "National Traditional Dress Day", Minister of Tourism Tijani Haddad told Ambassador he hopes to see greater numbers of American tourists in Tunisia. Haddad noted that in 2006 there were 16,000 American visitors, representing an increase over previous years, but nowhere near the numbers he would like to see. Ambassador raised Northwest Airlines' request for a codeshare flight with Air France and noted that this could pave the way for direct flights in the future. Haddad was enthusiastic about the possibility of direct flights, which would increase the desirability of Tunisia as a tourist destination for Americans, and offered to weigh in positively on the codeshare request. (NOTE: Following the meeting, Ambassador sent Minister Haddad details about the Northwest Airlines request and asked for Haddad's support. END NOTE.)

¶3. (SBU) Shifting to strategy, Haddad outlined the GOT desire to move the sector towards high-end and niche tourism. He noted that currently the market is geared toward "sun and sea" tourism, which limits the tourist season. He highlighted recent efforts to promote tourism to archeological sites and the Sahara as well as making Tunisia a destination for golfing and thelassotherapy spa treatments. In addition to the lack of direct air linkages, Haddad noted that Americans' lack of awareness about Tunisia serves as a secondary impediment to increasing tourism from the United States. To that end, the Ministry has prepared an advertising campaign that will air on CNN within the next month. Haddad was eager to enlist the involvement of the

Embassy in increasing the number of American tourists and the level of US investment in tourism. He responded enthusiastically when Ambassador raised the proposed April USG economic delegation visit and the possibility of a future private sector business delegation.

¶4. (SBU) Haddad lamented the decline in cultural cooperation between Tunisia and the United States and remembered a time when the American Cultural Center had weekly showings of American films. Haddad, a fluent English speaker, fondly reminisced about his previous travels in the United States and his own participation in an exchange program. He was particularly enthusiastic when describing the previous visits to Tunisia by Neil Armstrong and Senator Ted Kennedy. "We have to go back to that" level of engagement, Haddad asserted, because "misunderstanding is the worst thing that can happen." He hoped that linkages between US and Tunisian universities would increase and that US universities might consider locating in Tunisia. Ambassador stressed that the Embassy was actively working to increase cooperation, including on cultural activities.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: With this meeting, Minister Haddad joins the growing list of GOT ministers who have strongly advocated an increase in exchange programs and a desire for greater US investment. The tourism sector, one of the engines for the Tunisian economy, continues to perform well but has grown modestly in recent years -- posting only 2.7 percent growth in 2006. While increasing the number of US tourists would represent a boon to the tourist sector, Minister Haddad's enthusiasm for cultural cooperation and exchange indicate that he views tourism not only in economic terms, but also as a means to promote mutual understanding. END COMMENT.  
GODEC